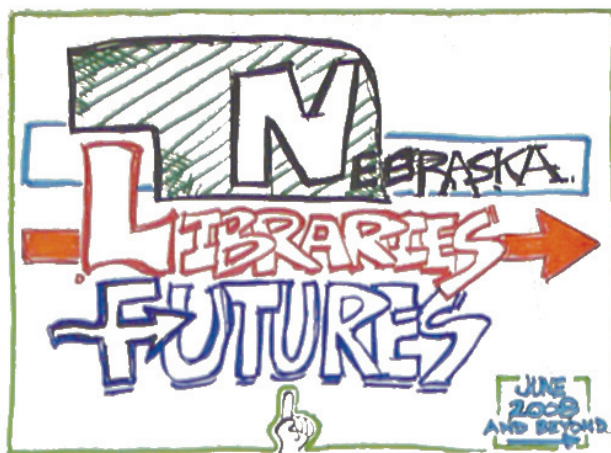# Nebraska Libraries
Future Search Conference
Charting a Future Course for Nebraska Library Services

June 9-10, 2008
Saint Benedict Center
Schuyler, Nebraska

Sponsors and Contributors
Peter Kiewit Foundation
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Hosted by
Nebraska Library Commission
"Bringing together people and information"

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The *Nebraska Libraries Future Search Conference* with over one hundred invited participants (more that eighty in attendance) was held in June 2008 with the goal of bringing fresh perspective to Nebraska library service needs and fostering direction, partnerships, and collaboration. It was a follow-up to *Nebraska Information Partnerships*, a statewide conference sponsored by the Nebraska Library Commission in 1991 that brought together people to envision goals and directions for Nebraska library services.

The mission of the Nebraska Library Commission is statewide promotion, development, and coordination of library and information services. As the state library agency, the Commission is an advocate for the library and information service needs of all Nebraskans. Its goals are:

1. All Nebraskans will have improved access to enhanced library and information services, provided and facilitated by qualified library personnel, boards, and supporters with the knowledge, skills, abilities, and attitudes necessary to provide excellent library and information services.
2. Nebraska libraries will have appropriate technology to access and deliver online library and information services.

More information about the *Nebraska Libraries Future Search Conference* is available at www.nlc.state.ne.us/wikis/fs. This Wiki will continue to be updated with activities across Nebraska that respond to the ideas generated by the Nebraska conference, see the What's Next? section of the Wiki.

Target Audience
The conference brought together people from communities across the state who have a stake in libraries that support the goals and progress of those communities. People from libraries as well as businesses, youth, education, government – customers and non-customers – all were given a voice in describing the kind of libraries they want to enrich their lives in Nebraska.

Desired Outcomes
The goals of the Future Search Conference were to:

• Develop a shared vision for library and information services in Nebraska.
• Design a blueprint for seamless, customer-centered, lifelong access to library and information services in Nebraska.
• Explore how all types of libraries can work together to provide library and information services more efficiently and effectively.
• Educate library staff and boards, public officials, customers, and other stakeholders about library and information services in Nebraska.
• Engage librarians from all types and sizes of libraries to unite and speak with one voice.

- Foster collaboration among library and information professional organizations, library advocates, including the Nebraska Library Commission and the Nebraska Regional Library Systems, and library resources, to improve library and information services for Nebraskans.

The Process

The conference was conducted using the Future Search process, which is a task-focused planning meeting that typically brings together people from all walks of life into the same conversation—those with resources, expertise, formal authority, and need. Through dialogue they discover their common ground and make action plans. For more information about Future Search, see www.futuresearch.net.

Focus Groups

The first phase of the conference was to gain feedback from library staff and board members, library users, library non-users, and community members who have a stake in the growth and development of library and information services. Prior to the conference, twenty-two focus group sessions were held across the state. Additional information about the focus groups is available at www.nlc.state.ne.us/wikis/fs/WorkingPapers.ashx.

Focus groups involving library staff and board members, library users, library non-users, and community members were held in these libraries and communities:

- Ainsworth Public Library
- Broadwater Public Library
- Columbus Library Board
- DeWitt– Burkley Library & Resource Center
- Gibbon Public Library
- Hebron Secrest Public Library
- Holdrege Area Public Library
- Hooper– Eastern Library System DIRECT Meeting
- Lodgepole – Nancy Fawcett Memorial Library
- McCook (primarily media specialists)
- Norfolk Public Library
- Northeast Library System Board
- Tecumseh– Southeast Library System/CASTL –(Conversation Among Small Town Librarians)
- Waterloo Public Library

Lodgepole Focus Group

Mitchell Focus Group

Focus group participants responded to these questions:

1. As a customer, staff person, and/or library user, what are your expectations of the library?
2. How are the roles of libraries changing?
3. What are the key trends and issues affecting libraries?
4. What library service needs and wants will you and your community have within the next five years?
5. What knowledge, skills and abilities do you and your community need to be successful?
6. Beyond your community whom do you want or need to partner with to be successful?
7. Other comments:

Several general themes emerged from answers to the focus group questions:

- Accessibility
- Changing Demographics
- Collections
- Community Values

- Continuing Education & Training
- Funding
- Infrastructure (buildings, bookmobiles, etc.)
- Intellectual Freedom & Censorship
- Library as Place (safe, community hub, social network, etc.)
- Marketing
- Partnerships/Collaboration
- Privacy & Security (of computer systems and patron information)
- Programming
- Staff (recruitment and retention, education, pay, etc.)
- Sustainability (long-term viability of library as institution)
- Technology

> "Librarians need to be knowledgeable not only in the latest technologies
> and their use, but in most instances must have some basic knowledge
> of how to keep these technologies running. To do this successfully,
> librarians must have the ability to partner with each other to share
> information and expertise and the ability to reach out to other experts in
> the community to learn and grow."…
>
> *– focus group participant*

The complete focus group report is located at

http://www.nlc.state.ne.us/wikis/fs/futuresearchfocusgroupreport.pdf.

2008 Nebraska Libraries Future Search Conference Agenda

Day 1

Introductions
- Welcome from Rod Wagner, Nebraska Library Commission Director
- Rationale for the Process – Why Now?
- Introduction to Future Search Process and Agenda
- Desired Outcomes
- Suggested Ground Rules

Looking Back
- Timeline of the Past Thirty Years: To identify lessons learned and core values to bring into the future

Looking Around
- Environmental Scan: To assess trends in Nebraska and the world
- Clarify the current context of Nebraska libraries
- Identify the Strategic Few

Looking Within
- SWOT Analysis: To assess Nebraska libraries' current response to these trends

Day 2

Looking Ahead
- Envision each person's preferred future for libraries, a vision that actively supports Nebraska's communities
- Create a shared vision by defining common ground
- Describe potential projects

Commitment to Action
- Share expectations and hopes
- Determine next steps to make the vision a reality
- Commit to individual and organizational actions
- Plan for communicating progress

Suggested Ground Rules

The suggested ground rules for the meeting participants were:

- Come with a desire to foster a broad perspective of what is good for Nebraska
- Share opinions candidly and constructively
- Take personal responsibility for our communication
- Take this opportunity to build relationships and expand our network
- Share different perspectives as an investment in long-term clarity
- Respect each other's expertise and the value of each contribution
- Respect time and keep our focus (cell phones off)
- Celebrate and acknowledge successes
- Recognize that most successes result from joint effort
- Identify areas for continuous improvement
- All ideas will be carefully considered
- Final decisions will focus on the "strategic few"

Looking Back: Historical Review

Participants were asked to identify the significant events within Nebraska libraries in the past thirty years. They were asked to hold statewide and local perspectives, and consider how they have been involved with the Nebraska library community's history. The results were charted on a fishbone diagram, with events on the upper diagonal lines and personal involvement on the lower diagonal lines. The graphic focused on Lessons Learned, Core Values, and Implications for the Future.

Participants chart events and their involvement on the "fishbone diagram"

Facilitators process the information on "Fishbone diagram."

Looking Around: Environmental Scan

The purpose of the environmental scan was to assess trends in Nebraska and the world to clarify the current context of Nebraska libraries. Individuals were asked to identify which current trends are impacting Nebraska communities, considering economic, educational, demographic, social, and political trends. They were asked to consider global, national, state, and local views.

Participants were asked to identify and discuss strategic trends that libraries can leverage to have the most impact for Nebraska libraries and their customers.

Looking Within: SWOT Analysis

Participants identify trends and chart them for sharing with the larger group.

Conference participants identified what they perceive to be the **S**trengths, **W**eaknesses, **O**pportunities, and **T**hreats to the future of library services in Nebraska. Here are their responses:

STRENGTHS
- Public library governing boards – sort of.
- Libraries have highly intelligent/creative staff/volunteers!! Some need more open minds.
- Libraries have interesting programs.
- Provide a lot of value for the dollar.
- The library field has potential for growth when tied to technology and human (social) interactions. Okay, could be an opportunity.
- View of some local officials about value of libraries and their services. Sell yourselves.
- Established line in the budget.
- Great location.
- "Free" to users.
- New facilities – in some communities.
- We are unique entities/institutions.
- Libraries are a trusted "brand' in communities.
- So what?
- Many different "journeys" in workforce – lots of different backgrounds and experiences.
- Tradition.
- Outreach services to the community.
- US (duh).
- Technology to go where the customers are – if money.
- Understand the value of content.
- Passionate.
- You've (libraries) have evolved before – you are experienced.
- Libraries valuable for economic development.
- Provide technological access for "have not's."
- Failure is not fatal – try again.
- Technology can let libraries go to the customer.
- Have the tools.
- We are often only ones keeping users' needs in mind ALL the time.

- Place for families to go for "free" entertainment in rough economic times.
- And "free" resources (cake pans!!).
- It may seem free, but someone has to pay for it.
- Children's programs that encourage use by young people.
- We weed, evaluate, assess, teach – do the leg work – to bring trusted reliable resources.
- Also bring controversy and broad ideas to communities.
- Worldwide connections with a variety of resources producing a range of information – WebMD. Yes!
- NE public libraries champions/servers of the disenfranchised. How do we know?
- Public access to the Internet, print and other media.
- Passionate staff – Yes!
- High return on investment.
- Networking capabilities – important.
- We know where to find information and its value to individuals and society.
- Patrons need to find it too.
- Still providing a human face – people talking to people.
- Value customer's right to privacy.
- Usually very customer service oriented.
- We like to try new things….sometimes.
- Human element….face to face communication.
- Are seen as neutral setting.
- Partner in education/literacy – Yes!
- Willingness to learn and grow.
- Ruralness – ability to know our customers well.
- Creates unique opportunity to collaborate/cooperate on forward-thinking projects.
- Open to new ideas and willing to take the risk.
- Not sure?
- Partnership with other institutions.
- A "place" to gather together, access resources, and get assistance.

WEAKNESSES
- Hesitant to build relationships outside of the library world.
- Only 24 hours in a day.
- Lack of high-quality, "strategic," and innovative technical expertise.
- Because of staff, equipment, funding? All of the above?
- Vision, planning, coordination.
- Fear of change.
- Arrangement awkward.
- Forgetting to focus on our strengths.
- Entitlement.
- Dependent on local/state funding.

- We don't promote our full range of services – not proactive.
- Insularity of library profession – yes – get moving.
- Age of work force.
- Too territorial about information role, staff, etc.
- LC and other classification schemes….
- Lack of diversity in workforce and resources.
- Lack of rapidity of change.
- Includes slow response to environment changes or to capitalize on opportunities.
- Staff who refuse to change.
- Lack of recruitment of new staff and new ideas.
- Tradition.
- Prefer to let others lead.
- Afraid of making mistakes.
- Entrenched staff.
- Ignore trends.
- Bad delivery – yes.
- Willingness to accept "what we get."
- Library hours.
- Difficulty in quantifying value, effectiveness.
- Library not seen as player in economic development – true (this can be an opportunity).
- Unwillingness/reluctance of libraries to consolidate.
- Inactive boards.
- Unaccredited public libraries.
- Strong community leaders not recruited to library boards – why?
- View of some local officials about the value of the library and its services – therefore?
- Need labels for non-fiction?? Marketing? This is our fault, sorry!
- Simplistic perceptions by public – "library books."
- Isolation – "hard to circle one wagon."
- Library world does not always speak with one voice (lack of unity).
- Difficulty with change – stagnant model.
- Not understanding trends and keeping current with literature.
- Apathy.
- No elected officials or school administrators (ones not necessarily academics) with library/information backgrounds. No kidding!
- Will you run if nominated?
- Libraries have to sell themselves, lobby.
- Funding – not enough to start with and first to be cut. Therefore?
- Lack of marketing – expect people to "know" we are available to help.
- Failing to engage/tap into the baby boomer generation. Amen!
- Changing populations – always people moving into communities.

- Passive.
- Failure to tell our own story – brag about ourselves and to realize our own value.
- Reluctance to take the message of the library outside the library – Yes.
- We become defensive
- Libraries seen as stuffy places for old people.
- Poor connections between libraries across the state

OPPORTUNITIES
- Tradition.
- Lots of free technology/software for community building.
- Look at banks as models of service distribution – totally virtual. Great idea!
- Other organizations are available to help!
- We focus on technology…offer tech support.
- Show our value by using library value calculator on all Web sites. It's easy?
- Have fun!
- Interlocal agreement option for cooperation; by all types of libraries; between/among different types of entities. Another example of partnerships!
- We can provide the location and opportunity for issues discussion and knowledge sharing.

- Extensive (sometimes) patron databases – what are/should we be doing with information we have? What more could be collected and used?
- Volunteers.
- High school students – teach senior computing classes and seniors help with ESL classes. Intergenerational opportunities.
- Services for mentally handicapped.

- "Open Source" thinking across the board creates a "one for all' attitude and known resources to help one another. Amen! Yes!
- Voice of many, not the "few."
- Teach about information beyond the first 3 hits.
- Skills to take people beyond Google.
- Work together – we don't need to do this alone.
- Library partnerships – share the wealth – spread the expense.
- Employment and growth.
- Upcoming transfer of wealth – fundraising opportunities.
- Libraries still have citizens who want to tell great stories about us.
- Partner with schools
- You must figure out a way to engage the baby boomers and their wealth.
- To continually change – embrace change – to try new programming – new ways to thinking.
- Opportunity to pool human resources (librarians, info techs, academics, etc.) on an unprecedented level to "tame" the information explosion.
- Increase in diverse population – also offers increases opportunities for community partnerships. Yes! Amen!
- We have the opportunity to constantly re-invent ourselves.
- Maximize the money and resources that Google, etc., put into development for our patrons, our society, and our world.
- Huge resources available – make it accessible with technology.
- Use students as peer tutors.
- We can get into places/meetings other can't – we are perceived as a non-threat. Great point!
- Ask the users what they want us to be/do.
- US – we aren't tapping what we can do. Our skills, interests, passions, connections, talents, contacts, hobbies, skills, knowledge, experience, and preferences in chocolate.
- Have those staff create subject guides.
- Networking (global) – yes, let's work together.
- Help new populations (immigrants, newcomers) and "have not's" – by developing welcome packets and welcoming meetings. Either hire bilingual staff or provide staff comprehensive language training.
- Develop/create models/games to teach students value of information.
- Brain trust of retired trustees and librarians to draw upon.
- Mentoring.
- Customize library services/materials to specific business/interest groups.
- Collaboration – ask other leaders in schools, businesses, health care, government, etc. how they can work together. Be the spark that makes this happen. Start the conversation.
- WilsonWeb, Infotrac, … try to offer these.
- Be the UPS of information. What can "brown" do for you? Being where the people are…online, places, etc.
- More involvement in community activities.

- Can hold events that will pull teenagers (for example) in like puppet shows for elementary kids or mystery night for teenagers. Gets the kids busy and off the streets.
- Partner with social service organizations.
- Desire for this in the community in the library. The environment is ripe for this.
- Ditto: libraries have the opportunity to become the core of the community.
- Also perceived as neutral place.
- Reinvention before extinction. There may still be time.
- Get to know political candidates before election.
- Strengthen school/library partnership, working collection development to include curriculum.
- Extend curriculum.
- Tell our stories.
- Don't just talk about what libraries can do, demonstrate what we can do.
- Respond to the longtail. Yes!
- Changing demographics means changing communities.
- Open to everyone.
- Use resources to improve mental health or rehabilitation process.
- Teens.
- To hire diverse people in community to mesh community and library together.
- Pioneers in public awareness of issues – provide the tools to further public discussion.
- Webmd.com does ads – why can't we solicit pro-bono ad campaigns?
- New ideas/focus can bridge generation group.
- Be innovative = go where people are.
- Reinvent ourselves using social networking ideas and move past the way we have always done business.
- Appeal to Boomers – health, leisure, travel.
- Lots of educational opportunities. Lots of folks in library education programs.
- It's a business – we should run libraries as a business.
- Marketing
- Outreach – proactive delivery of information to groups.
- If everything is under control, you're going too slow.

THREATS

- Tradition.
- Continued lack of funding – YES!
- Performance budgeting – Zero-based budgeting.
- Locally: combating "guns & hoses" budgeting mentality.
- Wait too long to respond to funding threats.
- We are not needed.
- An obsolete institution – yep!
- Perceptions of library as a place and not as a service/community focal point.
- Other worthy causes in the community asking for support money.
- Barnes & Noble – we need to become more inviting to our customers.
- Aging professionals – and too slow to recruit a new generation.
- Professionals who live in the past and pull others down.
- Regulated Internet tiers.
- "Other" things are more important to fund.
- Anti-immigrant response – Amen!
- Fear.
- Thinking that co-location of libraries is "magic" answer to cost savings. What about better services? Different missions?
- Not seizing opportunities for tech innovations to advance services
- Continual whining about what we don't have – Amen!
- Lack of desire/money/education to pursue new technologies.
- Too much of holding on to "sacred cows" – protect our turf – Amen! Moo, Moo.
- Resistance to change.
- Staff that will not change how "we've always done it." – Change this.
- Apathy.
- Loss of population in greater Nebraska.
- Legislation taking away right to privacy.
- Hierarchical culture crushes/ignores new talent and input.
- Weak libraries go out of existence.
- "Noise" of many "needs" in the community. Library seems to be a quiet place not requiring community attention – "under the radar."
- Ourselves – pulled in many directions. This is so true!
- Competition from others to provide information. Extension and other publicly funded entities.
- Amazon, Google Scholar doing our job. Really?
- Web sites cannot replace us.
- Assumption that free information on Internet can replace entire libraries. Yes!

- Perception of this – The Internet has all people need – Libraries are obsolete.
- Lack of funds.
- Inability/unwillingness to "toot our own horn" and market ourselves.
- No public databases that support emerging literacy.
- Organizational self-doubt.
- Lack of collaboration.
- Entropy/bureaucracy
- Used by a minority of the population
- De-emphasis of print material – why?
- Money/time to investigate new user groups.
- Because libraries are open to everyone libraries become sanctuaries for mentally ill and homeless.
- Libraries don't become sanctuaries for anyone.
- People being satisfied with a quick answer, not necessarily a good answer.
- Information literacy – being a good consumer of information.
- Well meaning, but harmful to access to information, legislation.
- The need to "no." Time to start saying "yes."
- Dinosaurs in "the pit" – holding back.
- Staff faces not reflecting the customers' faces – Yes!
- Not viewed as "essential" government services. And seen as adding no value to community.
- People (taxpayers) don't understand what librarians actually do.
- Economic viability – extinction by constantly serving the underserved – those without power and influence in the community.
- Lethargy.
- No elected officials with library/information background!
- Will you run if nominated?
- Educate us!
- Yes – advocate!
- May have experience with libraries but don't understand the issues.
- So how are the new libraries being built?
- Negative buzz – or even worse, no buzz in a community.

- Community has a certain perception and library is not telling its own story.

Looking Ahead: Envisioning a Preferred Future for Libraries that Support Nebraska's Communities

Individuals were asked to imagine themselves five to ten years into the future when Nebraska library service is addressing the anticipated environmental changes and providing excellent support for the communities in Nebraska. Libraries are thriving because they are playing a vital role for their customers, who are getting the services they want and need. Library staff are capable, flexible, and cooperative in their work.

With this picture in mind, participants were asked to answer the following questions and discuss their responses:

1. Who are your library's customers? Are there customers in your vision who are not currently being served?
2. What services are being provided? Why? How are they being provided? What technology is being used? Where are they provided?
3. What kind of employees do you see? How are they interacting with customers? What do they need to be successful?
4. How is your library interacting with other entities? What partnerships have been formed?
5. What services are you using from your library? How is your library supporting your needs? The needs of your community?
6. What are you doing to support the success of your library? Nebraska libraries?

Creating a Vision

Conference participants were asked to write a vision of a preferred future for their library or Nebraska libraries. They were asked to create a clear, compelling picture of the desired future, including strategic directions/priorities to focus decision making, and create an image of the institution and the profession. An imaging activity served as a catalyst for the individual visions, which were to conform to the following criteria: customer driven, concrete, compelling, credible, confronting, and communicable.

Attendees shared their vision with others at their tables. They were asked to consider good ideas they heard from their colleagues' personal visions and each table developed a shared vision.

Vision statements that emerged were:

A. The library is a vital hub, woven into the fabric of the greater community, responding to and empowering people through local and global connections.

B. Service—Nebraska libraries lead a magnificent metamorphosis of superior customer service, humming with activities and learning, unencumbered by walls or political boundaries.

C. Embrace the richness of a global community.
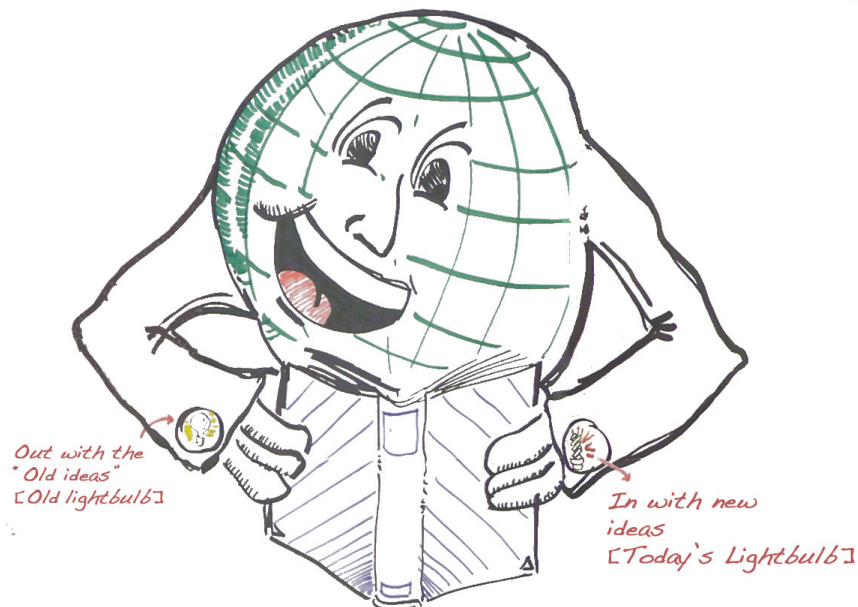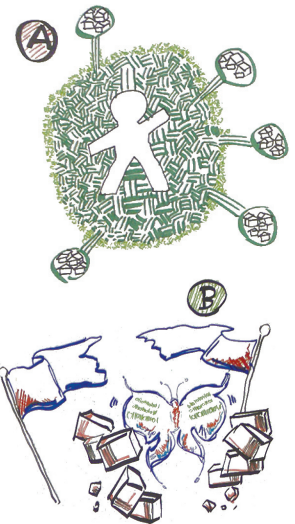
D. My library provides an inviting and welcoming front porch where the community comes to learn, play and investigate. People come first in this nurturing and enriching gathering place for all.

E. Increasing the visibility of Nebraska libraries through listening, communicating, and delivering services to enhance our communities.
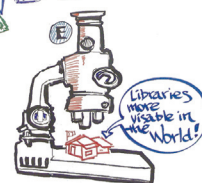
F. Core Values—The library champions universal access to information for purposes of personal and community empowerment through communication, collaboration and customization.
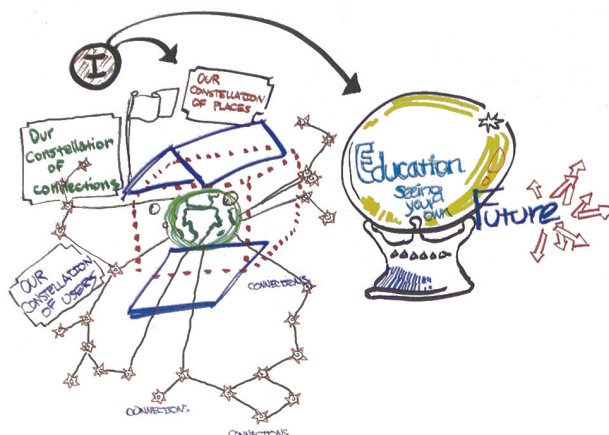
G. Going green starts @ your library®: the library models environmentally sustainable practices, places and policies, and shares these with the community.
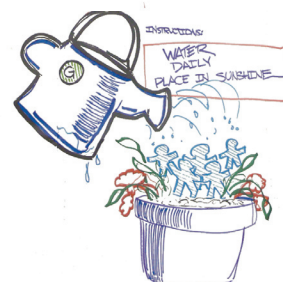
H. The staff is key to the success of the library: cultivate our staff.
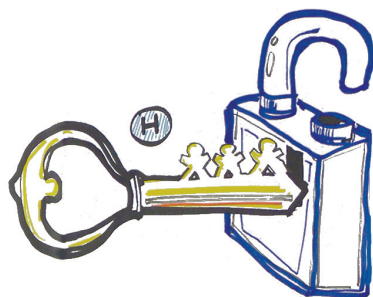
I. Facilities and Buildings—A convenient, vibrant place to discover life's possibilities.

J. Education—Our library is an innovative, vibrant place of discovery where collaborative learning spaces encourage sharing of ideas between all ages and languages while promoting lifelong learning, literacy, and literary leisure, thereby enabling users to succeed anytime, anyplace, on any path at any pace.

K. Your library: the "easy button" to timely, relevant resources for all your information needs. (Substitute "quick easy fix button" for "easy button" in case of copyright problems.)
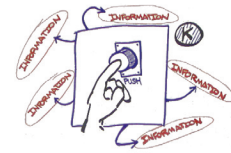
L. Technology—We are a technological hub, committing ourselves to providing seamless connections and equitable access to high quality virtual resources.
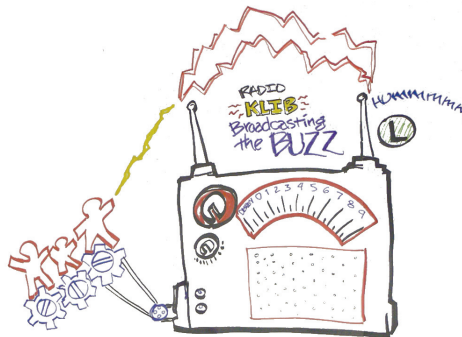
Describe Potential Projects

Participants were asked to envision broad strategic directions as they listened to others describe their preferred futures. They were asked to identify goals that would be part of those directions and what difference they would make in their communities. Finally, they were asked to brainstorm potential projects that would achieve those goals and how they would measure their success.

The following ideas are the product of individual and group brainstorming during the conference and do not necessarily reflect consensus or "common ground" agreement of participants as a whole.

Project Brainstorming Ideas

Values
• Publish vision and mission
• Form PAC (Political Action Committee) to elect librarians or library supporters
• Intergenerational training (technology)
• Communicate library's creed/values
• Get library staff in the field

Facility/Building:
NOTE: Nebraska Library Commission is working with Clark Enersen Partners on the Ask the Design Pro Wiki. This resource will help address the needs of library staff and supporters for answers, or directions to answers, to questions regarding your library buildings or sites., see Ask a Design Professional Wiki (http://www.nlc.state.ne.us/wikis/AskDesignPro/).

"Refresh your Library"
- Repaint
- New carpet
- Remove crap/clutter (signs, stuff that doesn't work or you don't need)
- Better signage
- Move the furniture; put it on wheels so users can move
- Merchandise and display collection
- Make building more intuitive to users
- Adapt to and create new uses for building/ space

Front Porch
- Grandparents reading to kids
- Singing
- Serve seasonal beverages
- Read around the posies
- Rock-a-thon
- Kool-Aid stand
- Spooning
- Birdhouses
- Ice cream socials
- Bluegrass
- Shoebox social
- Gaming bees – "Wii-Bee"
- Film festival – outdoors; make community films
- Chautauqua
- Greeters
- Local art displays
- Historical reenactment
- Make your own video
- Open microphone events
- "Fine front porch" – less formal entry
- Have experts make visits to make suggestions on making physical space more hospitable
- Outreach to determine what is done (especially diverse populations)

- Curbside service on roller skates
- Drinks and books
- Facebook, Myspace; and whatever is next
- Posters where our neighbors are
- Wii tournaments

Diversity
- Create/develop diversity toolkits to use in community
- Organize children's story hour on books from various cultures
- Create multi-ethnic displays in prominent areas of library (language, celebrations, etc.)
- Create programs with speakers from community, universities/colleges
- Host "read-in" programs from various cultures (e.g. Asian-American)
- Host discussion groups with ethnic community leaders (food, art, music, libraries)

Marketing
- Surveys
- Blogs
- Focus groups
- Listening
- Communication plans
- Online town meetings
- Training
- ROI (Return On Investment) – show value of library to community's economy

NOTE: See the ROI Wiki, www.nlc.state.ne.us/wikis/roi4libraries for information on ROI training and technical assistance offered by the Nebraska Library Commission
- Create endowment for staff and library operations

NOTE: See NowHiringAtYourLibrary.org for information about the Nebraska Library Commission partnership with the Nebraska Community Foundation to assist libraries that want to develop endowment resources for staffing library operations.

Go Green
- Point-of-need water heaters
- Solar panels on roof to power computer lab as demo project
- Install rainwater collection system to irrigate landscaping
- Use carpet squares with recycled content
- Ask patrons for grocery bags for materials checked out
- Network copier to workstations to reduce need for printers
- Host a recycling day
- Arrange programs on wind, solar energy, etc.

Services
- Build easily searchable one-stop catalog on state level for information/databases
- Place information kiosks around community; open branches around community (hospital, grocery store, etc.)
- Conduct "Oprah-like" programs for adults each week
- Create a children's activity room (like McDonalds) with small doors, 'kids only', kid's music, etc.
- Write newspaper articles asking "What can the library do for you?"
- Explore how the library can partner with business for economic development; schools (opportunity for business students)
- Explore how libraries can pull in teens for services other than reading
- Library as front door and front porch to community – welcome mat
- Have goal that all staff are trained to lead in customer-centered service
- Conduct training through Nebraska Library Commission and Regional Library Systems

NOTE: See www.nlc.state.ne.us/training for information about Library Training Opportunities.

- Grade outcomes with customers through service Olympics or through "Secret library customers"
- Praise and reward staff for excellent service

- Develop "personal librarian" services – a staff member who would be with the customer from first point of contact through successful delivery of services
- Create/position "points or paths of learning" – areas for concentrated resources (books, AV, maps, electronic information, etc.)
- Continual customer training for staff
- Continually listen to patrons
- Accept all diverse views without bias by welcoming programming at the library

Training
- Create a multimedia center – share technical expertise
- Develop collaborate spaces – virtual and physical; blogs and wikis; videoconferencing
- Educate around interests
- Digitization of works

NOTE: See www.memories.ne.gov for information about Nebraska Library Commission partnership efforts to digitize Nebraska-related historical and cultural heritage materials and make them available to researchers of all ages via the Internet.
- Individualized reading plans

Technology
- Geek squad or person for every system office with additional support by professional development group and/or wiki clearinghouse
- Single sign-on to multiple electronic databases

NOTE: See www.nlc.state.ne.us/nebraskaccess/ for access to Nebraska Library Commission NebraskAccess databases via Nebraska driver's license authentication.
- Every library in the state have a Web page and host local Web sites

Note: The Nebraska Library Commission will offer Web development services for public libraries through Plinkit (http://www.plinkit.org).
- Technology toolkit at systems offices to demonstrate emerging technologies
- Use and promote the 23-things program from Nebraska Library Commission (www.nlc.state.ne.us/netserv/learning2.0)

NOTE: The Nebraska Library Commission is offering Nebraska Learns 2.0 for library staff across the state, see http://12ne.blogspot.com/2008/09/thing-1-discovery.html for more information.
- Technology camp – like Library Leadership Institute but with a technology focus

NOTE: See http://librarycampnebraska.pbwiki.com for information about the Nebraska Library Commission's Library Camp Nebraska (November 19, 2008).

Staff
- Acknowledge each person; every day
- Send staff to training \ Include 'soft' skills (people skills) in evaluations
- Survey patrons regarding their experience with staff and share results with staff
- Encourage/expect staff to treat each other with kindness and respect

Miscellaneous
- Create pathfinders on Web page targeted to micro-communities; benchmark and analyze usage of resources
- Target with Scouts and other groups to provide resources and mentors
- Text the library after hours
- Open houses on ethnic holidays; provide related information and resources
- Liaison to government agencies with targeted resources

• Work with Chamber of Commerce; feature a business leader every month in publication (newsletter, blog, etc.)

Commitment to Action

As a final step, conferees were asked to share their expectations and hope, determine next steps to make the vision a reality, commit to individual and organizational actions, and plan for communicating progress. These commitments were shared with the group. A record of some of these activities is located at **What's Next? Nebraska Libraries Future Search Conference Followup Activities (http://www.nlc.state.ne.us/wikis/fs/Whats%20Next.ashx).** A number of participants volunteered to serve on a task force to follow up on the conference. The activities of the task force can be found on

http://www.nlc.state.ne.us/wikis/fs/Nebraska%20Future%20Search%2OTask%20Force.ashx

Paul Hoffman illustrates the Conference themes.

Follow-Up Survey

Following the Nebraska Libraries Future Search Conference, attendees were asked to participate in a short online survey at www.surveymonkey.com. To date, thirty-four respondents have taken the survey, providing valuable feedback for the Task Force. Several themes emerged in their answers. Listed below are questions from the survey, the common themes, and selected quotes from respondents.

What did you take from the 2008 Nebraska Libraries Future Search Conference?

Respondents reported feeling energized by the conference but acknowledged that the future holds many challenges, and libraries must adapt and work together.

"We are a very dedicated group of professionals who are trying our best to become more proactive."

"The future of libraries holds many diverse opportunities and problems."

"Libraries have to change to meet the needs of society in order to survive the future. The type of library does not matter. All libraries are being impacted by the lifestyle of the users and tight budgets."

"Nebraska libraries have a wonderfully creative, passion-filled group of supporters and workers who are trying very hard to meet their communities' needs. Most seemed to want their library to be more a part of community life than we can claim at present."

"Libraries must adapt and change with the times, or they run the risk of becoming dinosaurs."

"The vision for Nebraska libraries is to work in partnership if any of us are to survive in this era. I think there's hope!"

"A sense that all libraries have a common mission that can be best accomplished by working together."

"There are many energetic, interested citizens across the state that are committed to the success of libraries."

"Libraries have to change to meet the needs of society in order to survive the future."

"The library can choose not to change but it could prove lethal to the life of the library."

What motivated you or had the most powerful impact on you?
Many respondents commented on the passion and vision of attendees, and said the interaction with people outside the library world was most insightful, particularly with young people, but also representatives from government and business. They also mentioned the value of talking with librarians from other types of libraries.

"The strength of commitment of other participants and the energy created toward a goal."

"The conversations and our final recommendations were powerful."

"Great discussions with people who have great vision."

"The array of constituencies represented: students, civic leaders, financial and other kinds of planners, trustees, and other interested parties, as well as librarians representing all regions of the state, and many kinds of libraries in the state."

"Interaction with non-librarians. The lack of importance of libraries to the youth there, and these were involved kids! Scary!"

"Having business and government attendees was great."

"Communicating with the variety of librarians that were in attendance. Listening to their excitement and taking home so many great ideas."

"Meeting people from the smaller western Nebraska towns whose patrons and students have the same needs and concerns as those in the big city of Omaha."

"Having a few students there was a great opportunity to hear what they want and need from libraries. It is very different, in many cases, from what we are providing to them."

"The student who thought libraries were not relevant to his life—libraries must get with it, for they run the risk of extinction."

"The youth involvement and candid comments were powerful. Although, certainly the individuals from professions outside the library also was valuable and an important piece for future networks and collaboration."

What was valuable to you?

Again, respondents remarked on the value of hearing from non-librarians, especially students. Many commented on the value of networking with others in attendance.

"Hearing others' perspectives, especially non-librarians, to get a better idea of what the rest of the world thinks about the future of libraries."

"The opportunity to connect with people new to me who cherish Nebraska's libraries."

"The networking and opportunity to talk to different people about their perspective was very valuable. The fact that all were not librarians created diversity which enhanced the conference."

"New alliances; new formation of ideas; new clarity in facing the changes ahead."

"Networking; input from non-library staff participants."

"Networking with everyone, group discussions, future projections."

"Meeting people from a variety of walks of life—all interesting people."

"Greater knowledge about the future possibilities for libraries; opportunity to get to know people committed to strong libraries across the state."

"Listening to the different perspectives and input of attendees, especially the high school students whose "vision" really reflects what the future of libraries can be."

"The collaboration with public librarians (I am a school librarian) was wonderful. We aren't so different."

"Hearing from young people and non-librarians."

"The vision statements, the actions suggested and brainstormed—and most definitely links with individuals that have not been made previously."

What do you want to absolutely make happen as a result of this conference?
Respondents want ongoing communication between all types of libraries and increased collaboration, and for libraries to become stronger within individual communities. A few people also mentioned the importance of helping rural libraries grow.

"Ongoing, continuing, organized get-togethers with non-librarians—to build support, consensus, and understanding both ways."

"Libraries across the state working together for learning and information promotion."

"Library staff, boards, and friends becoming proactive in their communities to look ahead and evaluate the course of the role for libraries."

"Continued conversations among all types of libraries. I want schools, public, academic, and special libraries to all have a voice with the Library Commission."

"By knowing how all of our services weave together, overlap and enrich each other, we have a stronger voice in our communities, in our state."

"Increased collaboration among library entities."

"I hope that there is more action by libraries to examine and provide the essentials for individual communities."

"Enhanced collaboration among public agencies."

"Change - Connectivity - Cooperation – Circulation"

"Keep the Library Technical Assistant community college program going and work to strengthen it for the benefit particularly of small rural libraries. I also feel very strongly about helping to assure that rural areas of the state have sufficient hardware, software, and bandwidth to provide free and easy access to the vast digital resources of knowledge and information that many in other parts of the country and state take for granted."

"I'd love to see us move forward particularly on the front porch and green ideas."

Additional comments.

"This state has a strong past in libraries as part of its infrastructure for education, service and community life. The conference gave me a feeling of confidence that Nebraska will move thoughtfully and in an informed and considered way into the future with its library infrastructure."

"While I understand the approach of looking at the historical trends, I think, if a similar event were planned in the future, far less time should be devoted to this, and more to actionable plans following the project brainstorming, particularly at a statewide level. It would of course, have been difficult to gain consensus with so many people at the conference, but it was easy to leave the conference feeling as though you were just at the jumping off point of getting started."

"Access to information has never been more important to Nebraskans than it is now, and libraries are critical to all having access to information and lifelong learning regardless of their educational level, economic resources, or geographic isolation."

"If there is some statewide effort afoot that is extending the pipe for digital communication to rural Nebraska, I would be very willing to offer my support or assistance in making that happen in a timely manner."

"We must not lose the enthusiasm that was evident at the conference. We must do the hard work necessary to make libraries relevant in the 21st century."

"Now that we have a great sense of what libraries think, is the next step to gather users, and find out what their expectations are? And gather the funders, and find out what they expect?"

"I think we had difficulty identifying trends/issues that were not the traditional library trends we always talk about. We are so entrenched in those it's hard to nudge us beyond, and I think we need some more work in that area."

"Perhaps librarians involved in processes like this need to be a part of exercises where we just listen to those not in our profession and don't talk."

Nebraska Library Future Search Planning Committee

Patty Birch, North Platte High School
Jim Bothmer, Creighton University
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Brenda Ealey, Southeast Regional Library System
Gail Formanack, Omaha Public Schools
Greg Mickells, Lincoln City Libraries
Lisa Olivigni, Crete Public Library
Kris Rogge, Johnson, Nebraska
Bev Russell, Scottsbluff Public Library
Rivkah Sass, Omaha Public Library
Wally Seiler, Alliance Public Library Foundation
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Kathy Tooker, Eastern Regional Library System
Rod Wagner, Nebraska Library Commission

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Becky Schreiber
John Shannon

Nebraska Libraries Future Search Conference Task Force

A conference participant stated that he hoped there would be action by libraries in individual communities. Needs will be different from community to community, and the task force can explore ways to help them succeed. The task force also can explore whether there is a need to continue with a statewide collaboration and whether people from inside and outside of libraries will work together to develop action plans for one or more issues that were raised during the Nebraska Library Future Search Conference.

Task Force members are:
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Nebraska Library Future Search Conference Participants

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Siobhan Champ-Blackwell, Omaha
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Sarah Dempsey, Norfolk
Marcia Dority Baker, Lincoln
Brenda Ealey, Lincoln
Kathy Ellerton, Columbus
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Molly Fisher, Lincoln
Gail Formanack, Omaha
Steve Fosselman, Grand Island
Joan Giesecke, Lincoln
Charles Gordon, Fremont
Rachel Hanigan, Lincoln
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Julee Hector, Lincoln
Barbara Hegr, Nebraska City
Karen Hein, Omaha
Brian Heitz, Alliance
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Paul Hoffman, Lincoln
Jane Hood, Lincoln
Sherry Houston, Hastings
Bridget Kratt, Papillion
Ellen Lierk, Alliance

William Lonn, Lincoln
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Joe Magniamelli, Columbus
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Trine McBride, Ord
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Greg Mickells, Lincoln
Richard Miller, Lincoln
Mary Nelson, Elwood
Lisa Olivigni, Crete
Sharon Osenga, Kearney
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Rob Placek, Alliance
Mary Reiman, Lincoln
Tom Rolfes, Lincoln
Bev Russell, Scottsbluff
Mary Jo Ryan, Lincoln
Valetta Schneider, Scottsbluff
Wally Seiler, Alliance
Leslie Seymore, Omaha
Lois Shelton, Wayne
Michael J. Smith, Lincoln
Ted Smith, Norfolk
Pam Soreide, Holdrege
Carol Speicher, Columbus
Sean Story, Lincoln
Kathy Tooker, Omaha
Ryan Town, Lincoln
Lisa Voss, Lincoln
Susan Warneke, Norfolk
Dawn Weber, Gordon
Rod Wagner, Lincoln
Lynette Wieger, Omaha
Ken Winston, Lincoln

Related Readings

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- *Creating the Ultimate Information Experience: Planning Our Next Generation Libraries* by Thomas Frey, Executive Director and Senior Futurist at the DaVinci Institute. The trend in the information world is to make the interface between information and our brains as seamless as possible. If all we do is download tons of information into our brains, we haven't accomplished much. Information needs to be relevant and meaningful. In short, we need to experience it. www.davinciinstitute.com/page.php?ID=162

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